Gender equality and women's empowerment: transforming the lives of girls and women through EU external relations 2016-2020

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The European Parliament adopted by 383 votes to 118, with 120 abstentions, a resolution on the implementation of the Joint Staff Working Document (SWD(2015)0182 - Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: Transforming the Lives of Girls and Women through EU External Relations 2016-2020.

The original Gender Action Plan I (2010-2015) (GAP I) brought some progress, but was also marked by a number of shortcomings.

The new Gender Action Plan II 2016-2020 (GAP II) focuses on shifting EU institutional culture at headquarters and delegation levels in order to create a systemic change in how the EU approaches gender, as well as on transforming women's and girls' lives.

Review of the gender equality action plan (2016-2020): the GAP II has been produced in the form of a Joint Staff Working Document. The Commission is called on to demonstrate its firm commitment by upgrading it into a future **communication** on gender equality.

One year on since the adoption of GAP II, a number of **positive trends** have been noted. However, a number of challenges have been noted as regards the reporting and implementation of key priorities and gender-related SDGs and the monitoring of progress on all objectives, as well as in terms of mainstreaming gender into sector policy dialogue.

Parliament noted that GAP II provides a comprehensive agenda that spans the entire EU foreign policy agenda, and welcomes in this regard the choice of **three thematic pillars**, namely:

- ensuring girls' and women's physical and psychological integrity,
- promoting the economic and social rights and the empowerment of girls and women, and
- strengthening girls' and women's voice and participation.

These three pillars aim to address the main factors and causes of **discrimination and marginalisation**:

- sexual violence (e.g. harmful traditions, such as child marriage and female genital mutilation);
- limited access to basic sectors and social services, such as health, education, water, sanitation and nutrition;
- difficulties in accessing sexual and reproductive health;
- unequal representation in public and private institutions, in political decision-making processes and in peace processes.

Members welcomed the expansion of the gender action plan to all EU external services and to the Member States, and noted the **progress in shifting EU institutional culture at headquarters and delegation levels**, which is key to strengthening the effectiveness of EU initiatives and their impact on gender equality.

However, they regretted that current programming appears to side-line the gender dimension in **situations of crisis or difficult conflicts** and that priorities related to family planning or reproductive health are

neglected both in terms of funding and programming. They called on the EU and all Member States to **ratify the Istanbul Convention**, as the first legally binding international instrument seeking to prevent and combat violence against women.

Key recommendations for the Commission/EEAS: Parliament called for:

- further steps to facilitate exchange of best practice in improving gender equality and gender mainstreaming between delegations and units;
- the strengthening of the human resource capacity dedicated to gender mainstreaming within the Commission's services, through tailored training and reorganisation of existing structures and by taking on additional staff;
- the promotion and mainstreaming of the principle of equality between women and men by the EU in its external relations;
- the strengthening of EU Member State and international action through the UN in order to more effectively address the impact of conflict and post-conflict situations on women and girls;
- for a mechanism to be set up expressly for the purpose of monitoring and strengthening gender policy under trade agreements;
- efficiently implement targeted policies to facilitate women's access to leadership and managerial posts;

Funding: Members noted that **adequate funding** for gender equality in external relations will be necessary to sustain political commitment to this goal. They stressed that current funding for gender equality and women's empowerment actions remains inadequate and urged that this situation be reversed in the next MFF.

In particular, they called for a **dedicated budget line** on gender equality to be established in order to address in a more prominent way the level of political participation and representation of women, in the EU's neighbouring countries and within the EU.

Parliament also recommended:

- promoting legal frameworks and strategies that encourage greater and more effective participation of women in peacekeeping and peace-building, as well as in EU mediation processes and military and civilian crisis management missions;
- increasing support to **local SMEs**, especially female entrepreneurs, via micro-loans to enable them to take advantage of private sector-led growth.